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EDVARD KARDELJ

Of the current crop of Yugoslav leaders, Kardelj is closest to Tito and, at least for the moment, is probably the front-runner in the succession sweepstakes. Should he get the top job, his staying power might be limited both by his health and because he is more ideologist than practical politician, but he will nevertheless remain a key member of the leadership after the old man goes.

Kardelj is the last of the small inner circle of lieutenants who worked hand-in-glove with Tito to shape Yugoslavia's peculiar kind of socialism and to build national indpendence. The two men have been close friends for thirty years. They worked together in the underground Communist Party in the 1930s, and Kardelj was on Tito's staff throughout the years of partisan warfare. Following the war he held a variety of top level positions--deputy premier, foreign minister, Vice President of the Federal Executive Council, and President of the Federal Assembly. He is currently a member of the party presidium and the Slovene member of the collective presidency that Tito set up to run the state after his passing.

Kardelj's primary work, however, has been in the field of ideology, and his role in the leadership has been analogous

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to that of Suslov in the Soviet heirarchy. As the Yugoslav party's chief theoretician since 1937, he is the principal doctrinal architect of Titoism. His most recent contribution, two and a half years in the making, is the new, complex constitution that Belgrade adopted last spring.

Whatever his role in the post-Tito epoch, Kardelj's attitudes are likely to be colored by a healthy suspicion of Soviet motives toward Yugoslavia. His distrust of the Kremlin dates from 1948, when Moscow's meddling in Yugoslav internal affairs triggered the angry exchanges between Belgrade and Moscow that resulted in Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform. It was rekindled this year by Soviet support of the Cominformist plotters and the necessity to go to Moscow, as he had done in 1948, to protest to the Kremlin. He found Brezhnev no more willing to promise redress than Stalin had been.

Kardelj will carefully balance his suspicions of Moscow with professions of equal distrust of the United States. He is probably sincere in his belief that Yugoslavia's best bet for the future is to steer the middle course of nonalignment between the superpowers. There have been some recent hints, however, that he would prefer to keep the door to the West at least slightly ajar, and he is on record as stating that the Soviet Union constitutes the only real threat to Yugoslav independence.

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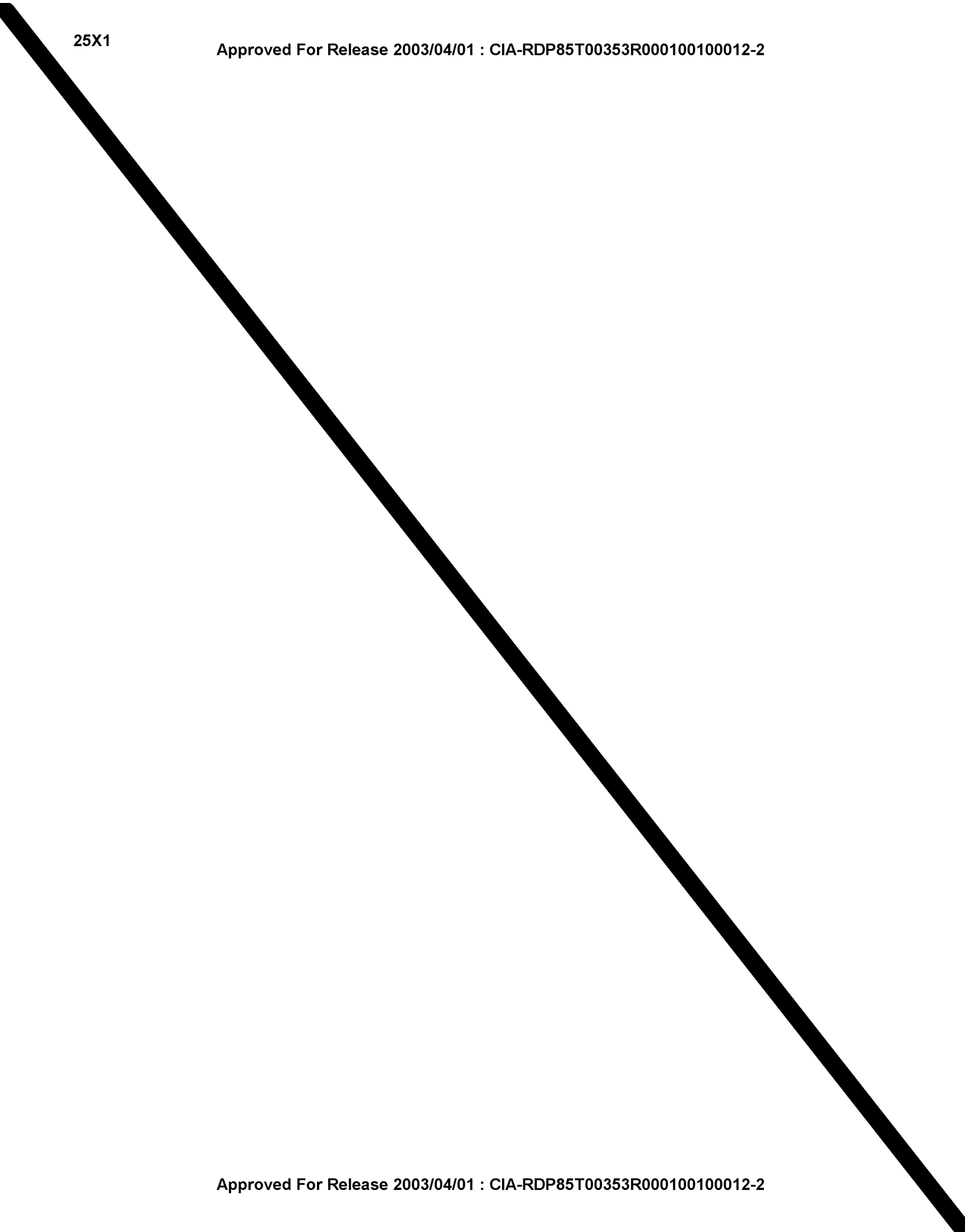

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